

Air Defense As An Organic Part of the Unit of Action

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"Air Defense As An Organic Part of the Unit of Action"

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Submitted by Captain Sonny Thompson

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One thing is certain, those who prefer to pretend the 21st-century air and missile threat does not really exist must also be prepared to pretend that soldiers killed by air and missile attacks are not really dead.¹

Major General John Costello

Chief, Air Defense Artillery 1997

¹ Jonathan M. Cohen, "Divisional Air Defense 1945-Present," Military Review (November-December 1999): 51.

Current deployments in support of OIF/OEF illustrate that soldiers of today must be competent not only in their military occupational specialty (MOS), but also in basic infantry type skills. Because of the extended deployments and shortage of personnel many soldiers are performing force protection type tasks such as manning traffic control points (TCPs) or conducting patrols regardless of their MOS. In garrison, units are steadily moving towards the Army's vision of brigade units of action (UAs) in which the brigade vice the division becomes the basic fighting force with its own organic combat arms, combat support, and combat service support. The problem, however, with the current UA plan is that it removes the short range air defense (SHORAD) capability from the divisional formation and places it at the corps level. This transference is problematic because the battlefield is still three dimensional. Divisional ADA soldiers possess those basic infantry type skills needed in current conflicts, and, regardless of current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, an air threat still exists in the world. Therefore, due to the increased necessity for a dedicated force protection element in a combat environment, the ever present air threat, and the SHORAD soldier's capability to effectively perform both standard and non-traditional missions, SHORAD

units would best serve the Army as an integrated element of the unit of action vice a corps asset.

AIR THREAT

According to Army doctrine, "the mission of US Army ADA is to protect the force and selected geopolitical assets from aerial attack, missile attack, and surveillance."² This mission statement, like every mission statement in the military, was based on a specific threat. For ADA the threat primarily comes from the air as its name suggests. There is a possibility of high, mid, and low altitude threats. Logically, if the threat exists, then there must be a countermeasure in place. Unlike the era of the Cold War, the current air threat on every level comes from "smaller threat countries" vice "a single country with a large and advanced air force."³ Based on the continued development of missile defense systems it is evident that the Army has acknowledged a high to mid altitude air threat. However, based on the force structure of the new UAs, one could assume that the lack of divisional ADA suggests that there is no longer a mid to low altitude air

² U.S. Department of the Army, *US Army Air Defense Operations: FM 44-100*, 1995 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1996) 1-2.

³ David S. Nahom, "A Joint Approach to Air Superiority" (Masters of Military Art and Science, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2001), 1.

threat to the brigade or division level. Though this logic make sense, the fact is that there is an air threat to the divisional and brigade level that can be mitigated by an organic SHORAD asset. The enemy has the will to maneuver freely based on his estimate of the situation, whether in a fixed or rotary wing aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), or even a ballistic missile. Because of this fact, the enemy will not be constricted to a certain altitude unless there are systems in place to do so. By reducing the number of SHORAD assets and moving them out of the divisional formation, there will be a gap in coverage. Ground-attack aircraft that would normally be restricted to higher altitudes based on the SHORAD threat will be more likely to fly lower and disrupt the friendly ability to maneuver on the ground. According to a study done through Fort Bliss, Texas:

Because cruise missiles and UAVs are universal threats, short-range air defenses (SHORAD) will also be needed to defend against weapons that make it through the outer layers. In those cases where manned aircraft are likely to be present, SHORAD systems can degrade the enemy's ability to attack U.S. and allied assets effectively by forcing enemy ground-attack aircraft to higher altitudes or by denying the enemy information gathered by UAVs.⁴

⁴ Frances M. Lussier and others, *Army Air and Missile Defense Future Challenges*, RAND (California: RAND, 2002), vii-viii.

Basing the need of divisional air defense on the current air threat or lack thereof in OIF and OEF would be a mistake. The threat must be assessed 20-25 years from the present date in order to be effective and since future allies and enemies could change, no possible threat should be ruled out.⁵

AIR DEFENSE MISSION SET

An air defender's primary mission in a basic sense is to protect assets by either passively or actively defeating the air threat at any unit level. All soldiers must be proficient in their MOS skills. However, what makes the divisional air defender unique is the additional tasks, implied and specified, that must be completed in order to fully integrate with the supported unit. For example, in the 82D Airborne Division a paratrooper from the SHORAD battalion must be proficient in MOS type skills, ie engage an aerial target with a Stinger missile. However, this same soldier must also be able to effectively rig individual equipment, dawn a parachute, successfully exit an aircraft with full combat gear (including a Stinger Missile), and then tactically maneuver to his position before ever performing the SHORAD primary mission. Because

⁵Lussier and others, Army Air and Missile Defense Future

of these requirements, this soldier eventually becomes proficient with basic infantry skills, the same skills used and needed in Iraq today. As a result, as made evident by the current use of divisional SHORAD soldiers in OIF, this soldier, while proficient in short range air defense, is also inherently proficient in skill sets that support patrolling and other force protection measures.

NONTRADITIONAL MISSIONS

The Army has been employing soldiers of every MOS in nontraditional missions or missions that they are not specifically trained to do. As depicted daily by the media, some soldiers do well and some do not. Soft skilled MOSs are not sufficiently trained to perform nontraditional missions, such as perimeter security and traffic control points, yet they are still being tasked to do so. The air defense soldier, on the other hand usually does well at the nontraditional missions. In Iraq, air defenders are being used primarily as a force protection unit, conducting missions such as perimeter security, traffic control points, convoy escorts, and even patrolling. The fact that they are doing well is not a coincidence. They are better suited for the mission because they are not a soft skilled MOS and they are fully integrated with the training of an

infantry task force.

COUNTER-ARGUMENT

Though the Stinger missile has been proven effective in combat by Afghanis, the U.S has yet to prove it. The U.S. has never fired a Stinger missile in a combat situation. Also, the U.S. has the best Air Force in the world and it has been proven that they can achieve air superiority with ease, which negates the need for SHORAD. The Patriot, however, has been combat proven to shoot down ballistic missiles-something that the air force cannot do with aircraft, therefore validating the HIMAD requirement. Although these statements seem convincing as a counter-argument to the utility of SHORAD in a UA, there are still flaws. The fact that the U.S. has not been or is not currently in a conflict requiring SHORAD coverage at the division/brigade level does not mean that they never will be. Also, though the U.S. has the best Air Force in the world, they are unable to cover the entire spectrum of space against every threat. In other words, as stated earlier, even with the use of HIMAD and fixed wing aircraft, the low to mid altitude battle space would still be vulnerable without the use of SHORAD assets to either deter or destroy the enemy.

BOTTOM LINE

The bottom line is that there is a valid air threat to brigade and division level formations that could be mitigated by integrated SHORAD assets. To be effective, a maneuver unit and all of its supporting efforts must be integrated. Knowing this, it is impossible to successfully fight as an integrated team and be successful if units are linking up for the first time at the Intermediate Staging Bas (ISB). SHORAD must fall in the UA formation and train, maintain, and sustain as a unit in order to effectively fight as a unit. Though the SHORAD air threat is not prevalent in current conflicts UAs and divisions must be ready if they ever become prevalent. In the mean time, the divisional/UA air defense soldier is already trained and proficient in conducting several nontraditional missions and will continue to serve as a force multiplier.

Therefore, due to the increased requirement for a dedicated force protection element in a combat environment, the ever-present air threat, and the SHORAD soldier's capability to effectively perform both standard and non-traditional missions, SHORAD units would best serve the Army as an integrated element of the unit of action vice a corps asset.

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